

Perpetual Transitions: A Communication Between Lens Based Media and Absence
Within the Spatial Experience of the Ruin and how this Translates via Installation Art.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my sister, Odette.

‘I am the space, where I am.’ - Noël Arnaud

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Abstract

The word *ruin* originates from the Latin word, *ruere*, ‘to fall’¹ and has its origins from the notion of *fallen* or *falling stones*.² In this context, the ruin can be described as the remains of man-made architecture. In experiencing the ruin within its present state, the meaning and significance of absence can be observed as a felt sense and trace of lived space within the ruin. The capacity of lens based media as a phenomenological extension of body experience, communicates absence through direct observation. The use of film and photographic response as an experiential inquiry is key to the communication of absence and the phenomenologically experienced ruin in this research.

My research question is how absence is felt and experienced in the ruin and how it is communicated through the medium of lens based media. It is conducted through direct observation of absence, described here as ‘the non-existence, or lack of’³ and a subsequent lens based media response to the ruin of Nettleham Hall, in its present state. The outcome of the research is a large-scale installation piece and this accompanying text.

¹ Concise Oxford English Dictionary. ‘Ruin’, 12th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011), 1258.

² Michael Roth, Claire Lyons and Charles Mereweather, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Getty Research Institute Publication, 1997), 1.

³ Concise Oxford English Dictionary. ‘Absence’, 12th ed, 5.

Introduction

This thesis forms part of a research project that investigates the meaning and significance of absence and how this is both recognized and registered within a specific spatial setting. The corresponding element of this research is an art installation that interrogates Nettleham Hall as an architectural ruin and the communication of its experience through lens based media.

Methodologically, the research question: *how is absence felt and experienced within the ruin and how does one communicate absence through lens based media* is approached using a phenomenological perspective. This research investigates how the ruin affects us in an experiential way. How our bodies respond to the ruin and to absence. This approach allows the researcher to become central to the research process, gaining first hand knowledge through direct experience. The encounter and experience at Nettleham Hall will first be observed, interrogated and critically reflected on, before lens based media is situated as an analogous, visual response to that experience.

In order to identify more fully the elements that the research poses, responses to the question are divided into two reflexive and inter-connected parts. This deliberate action allows for a more rigorous investigation and philosophical grounding into the areas of phenomenology and ontology that the first part of the research question has taken. This action of theoretical contextualization will allow for a more critical approach in underpinning the significance of the practice in relation to the context of the research. It will firmly position lens-based media as a method of phenomenological inquiry, which has the capacity to visualize absence, as experienced at the ruin of Nettleham Hall.

Absence is described for the purpose of this text as ‘the non-existence, or lack of.’⁴ In addressing this meaning, absence requires context. This research looks at absence within a specific and phenomenological setting, the architectural ruin of Nettleham Hall. The first section of part one will explore the meaning and

⁴ Concise Oxford English Dictionary. ‘Ruin’, 12th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

significance of absence and how it is recognized and registered within a spatial setting. The thesis will then address the meaning and nature of Nettleham Hall as a ruin, before locating and contextualizing it as a specific place and space for multiple methods of inquiry. Since this research includes practice to inform the dialogue, the site of the ruin is essential to the outcomes and validity of the study. The ruin, as the location for the experience of absence, is specific to the context in which the research has been carried out. In order to explore any depth of spatial experience and meaning of connectedness, it felt necessary to focus the research and practice at Nettleham Hall.

A literature review will then follow with the aim of identifying key texts that have contributed to this research and have been crucial in understanding the nature of phenomenology as an experiential approach to space, place and absence. Texts will be explored to provide knowledge on the subject of spatial experience in general and how we perceive it and interact with it in response to the ruin.

In addressing the second part of the research question: *how does one communicate absence through lens-based media* from within the setting of the ruin, this will be approached chiefly through Empirical study. This is a substantial part of the research that makes the practice-based component essential. The response of lens based media, as an experiential inquiry is key to the communication of absence of the phenomenologically experienced ruin in this study. The capacity of film and photography to communicate time, duration and the ephemeral, mediates a visual trace and expression of the experience of absence within a defined space, necessitates its inclusion and significance. This is the primary reason for choosing lens based media as a visual response to the ruin and how I might communicate the spatial experience of the ruin into an installation based artifact. Part two of the thesis focuses on the practice and subsequent installation, its effect and translation of the experience encountered.

Since its invention during the 19th Century, the uses of lens based media and its' subsequent meanings are variable. Therefore section one of part two of the thesis will provide a short introduction to the practice of photography and film as

communicators of experience, trace and duration that are specific to the context of this research. A review of current practices that are relevant and significant to this research will follow, with the aim of identifying key areas of critical inquiry and various research strategies into the use of lens based media as a communicator of how space and place are experienced and subsequently visualized.

After positioning lens-based media as a visual communicator of trace and affect of phenomenological experience, chapter five reviews and documents my own photographic practice conducted at Nettleham Hall. This commentary is reflective and documents the practice methods used. It also demonstrates that lens based media, as a phenomenological inquiry, is essential in visualizing the experiential encounter of absence as perceived within the spatial setting of Nettleham Hall as a ruin.

The final and most significant part of this process has been the dissemination of the lens based media works. Throughout this research, I have applied critical reflection into the observation and interrogation of absence as experienced in the Hall. The research has been phenomenologically and ethnographically situated, so as to reflect on the experience and then communicate that experience into lens based media works. Careful consideration in visualizing the film and photographic material of this experience has been paramount. This process has taken the research into new possibilities and dimensions of dissemination. The outcome is a large-scale installation piece, which acts as an embodiment of absence and spatial experience, set within the remains of Nettleham Hall. Before critically reflecting on the installation, this chapter begins with a brief introduction to the meaning and significance of the art installation. The reason for doing this, is because, it places the installation as an essential outcome and inter-connecting part of the research study.

The final chapter of this thesis, draws together, conclusions on the inter-connecting parts of this research study, which are: absence as experienced, within the spatial setting of the ruin: lens based media as a phenomenological inquiry of the visualization and communication of absence and finally, the corresponding art

installation that further communicates the experience at Nettleham Hall, into a holistic and reflexive experience. The objective is to extend the dialogue of this research's inter-connected inquiries of phenomenology to a wider audience and suggest further debate on the phenomenology of lens based media and art installation, as methods of direct experience.

Chapter One

Absence, spatial Experience and Ruin

This chapter is a critical reflection and interrogation into to the first part of the research question: *how is absence felt and experienced within the ruin*. It investigates the three core contextual elements of phenomenological inquiry that comprise this research: absence, spatial experience and ruin. This research looks at absence within a specific and phenomenological setting, the architectural ruin of Nettleham Hall. The first part of this chapter will position and foreground the ruin as a place of fascination and the rationale of basing the research and practice in this specific setting.

The definition and associated meanings of the word ruin will be briefly described before investigating the significance of absence and how it is recognized and registered in that particular setting. The chapter will then address the meaning and nature of Nettleham Hall as a ruin, before locating and contextualizing it as a specific place and space for the experience of absence.

The Ruin: A place of Fascination

It is the intention that in observing the current behavior of fascination towards the ruin the contextual elements of phenomenological inquiry that define this research; absence, spatial experience and ruin, are more clearly defined. It also serves to position the ruin at the forefront, through which absence and spatial experience unfold and are recorded by multiple methods of phenomenological inquiry. The methods of research; observation, lens based media, theoretical analysis and reflection, serve to offer a mediation between the space of Nettleham Hall and the researcher; facilitating a dialogue of experience and practice taking place.

There are two types of ruin that are worth considering, for the placement of where this research lies: the *evolving* and the *arrested* ruin. Each differs in both appearance and experience. The ruin that is in an evolving state of decay, left to

the devices of nature is allowed to follow the course of time and slowness of entropy. In a constant state of flux and perpetual transition, they are positioned in the present the here and now. Philosopher Dylan Trigg echoes this notion of present time by suggesting, ‘in a word, they *decay*. The result of this active decay is that they viscerally engage with our sense’.⁵ This unfolding relationship with time and therefore richer awareness of existence, mediates the experience of absence as real. It is not possible with the arrested ruin because it has been preserved from further decay as soon as it has been reclaimed by the heritage industry, such as English Heritage (formed in 1983) and The National Trust (formed since 1895, in England). The type of arrested ruins in question are the heritage monuments, buildings and structures, that although attracts millions of visitors from around the world are ‘mere novelties and outside of time’.⁶

Through the course of this research I have visited, experienced and photographed both types of ruin. For me there is a marked difference in experience, spatial awareness and sense of absence. In the arrested ruin, I have not felt the same experiential connection that I felt with the evolving ruin. My own fascination and rationale for visiting the evolving ruin of Nettleham Hall is rooted in the phenomenological experience of its present state. It is a very real experience that fills the senses with a rich awareness of existence and time as unfolding. This ontological experience is where the rationale lies, for basing the research and practice within the *evolving* ruin and at Nettleham Hall in particular.

The Ruin: A Brief Description

The word *ruin* originates from the Latin word *ruere*, ‘to fall’⁷ and is often described as the remains of man-made architecture. When a building or structure ceases to function as it was originally intended and if left alone, it starts a slow

⁵ Dylan Trigg, ‘Architecture and Nostalgia in the Age of Ruin’, (University of Bath), 15 January 2010.
https://www.academia.edu/208447/Architecture_and_Nostalgia_in_the_Age_of_Ruin, 2. (Accessed 7 December 2014).

⁶ Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason*, (Peter Lang, 2006), 183.

⁷ Concise Oxford English Dictionary. ‘Ruin’, 12th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011), 1258.

process of decline and decay. Over time the building may become structurally unsound, where nature is allowed to invade seeking out exposed spaces and small cracks in which to take root and grow. Over an extended period of time the building is propelled into a further state of decay, where established nature alters and reshapes the building; by splitting, shifting and subsequently pulling down structural work with overgrown and heavy vines (plate 1). The building can be further altered through interventions such as extended exposure to time, animals, human activity and weather. At this point where decay turns the building into a ruinous state, the building becomes a ruin. A selection of my previous photographic research into the ontology of the ruin provide visual evidence of how an abandoned building or structure, if left over time falls into states of decay through natural elements such as invasive nature and weather (Plate 2,3&4).

Absence: A Felt Experience in the Ruin.

We experience and perceive absence through ourselves, our consciousness and in particular, awareness of the senses. The perception of architectural space involves the body as an entirety, as Philosopher Merleau-Ponty suggests in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. When we perceive space and place, all our senses are affected.⁸ Through awareness of the senses our bodies react physically and emotionally to the ruin, this reaction is felt through mediation of the body with that particular place. In this context of *ruin*, place is referred to as ‘individuated and particular’⁹ and ‘unlike space, which is geometrically defined and homogenous, place is local.’¹⁰ Being situated in place within the ruin, absence holds form, meaning and significance. Absence is described not as a tangible thing or object, but as a feeling or felt sense. It is a manifestation of feeling shaped through the body’s awareness, of the felt experience within the present state of the ruin. Absence is both experiential and phenomenological, meaning we can observe absence through direct experience of place and space.

⁸ Maurice Merleau Ponty, *The Perception of Phenomenology*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2006), 282.

⁹ Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason*, (Peter Lang, 2006), 121.

¹⁰ Ibid. 121.

Like absence, place is not a thing or actual object that exists in the world, it is not something that we go out and locate. Place exists because our bodies interact with it and make it so. Place relies on our bodies to give it substance and meaning. ‘We live in and remember places, because the particularity of place defines our temporal dwelling, and so our continuous identity.’¹¹ Merleau-Ponty further suggests that ‘place is the means whereby the position of things becomes possible.’¹² It is through the body’s experience and interaction with being in a particular given place that makes this feasible. He describes the body as ‘the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment.’¹³ The felt sense of absence is possible through the body’s reaction and interaction to the space that is particular to the ruin. The immeasurable sense of absence within a ruin, can also be felt through the presence of the remaining space and through the bodies keen awareness in detecting the way jagged natural light moves through curious open crevices and surfaces within the buildings’ remaining structure. ‘We are forever in the here, and it is from that our experiences take place.’¹⁴ The here, being the present.

Spatial Experience

Philosopher and writer Dylan Trigg, echoes this experience of visiting ruins through a phenomenological perspective, where he expresses that this as felt through the body and the body’s senses:

Our bodies respond to the texture of ruins. It is a very tactile and visual experience; from the unevenness of the floor beneath ones feet to the presence that a ruin possesses.¹⁵

¹¹ Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason*, (Peter Lang, 2006), 121.

¹² Maurice Merleau Ponty: *The perception of Phenomenology*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2006), 282.

¹³ Merleau Ponty: *The perception of Phenomenology*, 96.

¹⁴ Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, (Ohio University Press, 2012), 4.

¹⁵ Dylan Trigg, ‘Architecture and Nostalgia in the Age of Ruin’, (University of Bath), 15 January 2010. https://www.academia.edu/208447/Architecture_and_Nostalgia_in_the_Age_of_Ruin, 2. (Accessed 7 December 2014).

It is through the body that multiple sensory information such as; vision, touch, hearing, smell and taste interact with the environment around us. It is ‘through our senses that we receive stimuli from the environment and can convey them to the brain.’¹⁶ In other words, through the body, sensory information and emotional response such as perception, are able to react and interact with the world. Senses such as vision, sound and touch are essential for spatial experience. The human body responds to the spatial experience of the ruin through the senses. As well as stimulating the body’s senses the ruin also stimulates the imagination. ‘Between body and place there is much more than position, there is the data of our experience and expectations.’¹⁷ Fascination with ruins has led to multiple phenomenological interpretations through art, poetry, lens based media and sustainable architecture. This will be further expanded in chapter four. Critic Brian Dillon suggests that the ruin offers ‘radical potential – its fragmentary, unfinished nature is an invitation to fulfill the as yet unexplored temporality that it contains.’¹⁸

The reason for choosing the architectural ruin as a vehicle for spatial experience is through simply being a ruin it offers an observable tactile environment, for the investigation of the meaning and significance of absence. The final part of this chapter serves to situate the remains of Nettleham Hall as a ruin and rationalize it as a place and space of importance for the experience of absence and lens based media communication.

Nettleham Hall, as a Ruin: An Ethnographic Journey

Nettleham Hall is a former Georgian Mansion that sits just off of a main road yet its ruined remains are hidden from view. It lies within a small acre or so of

¹⁶ Concise Oxford English Dictionary. ‘Sensory’, 12th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011), 1312.

¹⁷ Maria João Durão, *Embodied Space: A Sensorial Approach to Spatial Experience*, Propulsion & Energy Sciences International Forum: SPESIF-2009. AIP Conference Proceedings, Volume 1103. AIP Conference Proceedings, Volume 1103, Issue 1, p.399-406. http://www.astrosociology.org/Library/PDF/Durao_SPESIF2009.pdf (accessed 15 January 2015)

¹⁸ Brian Dillon, introduction to, *The Ruin: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Brian Dillon (MIT Press, 2011), 18.

unmanaged and overgrown woodland (plate 5). The uneven woodland floor is dense with plants and exposed tree roots; occasionally there is a fallen tree that requires careful negotiation when walking. There is a narrow well-worn path through the woodland that leads from the road, around the closed entrance gates to the Hall and then to the Hall itself. The wrought iron gates are massive and imposing, it's hard not to wonder and anticipate what they lead to, such as, a building of importance (plate 6).¹⁹ The narrow path that leads to the Hall meanders around trees and small mounds, made by tree roots; branches and cobwebs are a constant nuisance about the face and body when walking, as they are generally undisturbed and are freely situated from the woodland floor, up to the tree canopy. Up ahead, there is a clearing that opens up to a small dilapidated cottage (plate 7). The cottage is situated to the right of the clearing; it has a small weathered wooden door that shows traces of yellow paint. Through the door of the cottage, the stairs to the second floor have collapsed into a dangerous heap on the remnants of the kitchen floor, which is still tiled with large earthen square tiles. The interior is largely inaccessible and poses danger at every turn. Because the cottage is dilapidated, the rotten timbers of the roof and walls are still shifting, crumbling and falling. Outside of the cottage now the path to the right, leading away from the cottage resumes its density of organic growth, then narrows again and continues and after about 200 yards opens up into another clearing, to the Hall itself.

At a first glance, the sand coloured stonework of the Hall is seen to be in an advanced state of ruin and is partially covered by a canopy of creeping vines, some as thick as a human leg. The scene is something out of Cambodia and is somewhat reminiscent to the ruins of Ankor Wat. The contrast between light coloured stone and nature is beautiful. The entrance porch to the property is of typical Georgian style, inspired by classical architecture. It is made up of a series of Greek style limestone columns, topped with a stone lintel and balcony that makes up the entrance porch and double doorframe to the property. The entrance porch is draped with a heavy canopy of vines. Only a small portion of the left side of the original wood and stained glass door remains, still on its hinges (plate

¹⁹ These gates are an unusual sight in Nettleham and are listed Grade I, by English Heritage.

8). To the right hand side, where the matching door would have stood are the doors' wrought iron hinges, still fastened to the stonework.

Even before one walks through the threshold of the porch into the open and exposed interior, there is an immediate sense and feeling of absence and presence to the place and the body's reaction is a combination of the senses all at once. The palpable sound of quietness of the surrounding rural woodland is combined with; birdsong, the smells of wood and soil and the tactile awareness of what is unfolding and emerging experientially, as one walks from the exterior, through to the interior. There is an initial undefined spatial awareness whilst trying to orienteer oneself to the surroundings and the senses that are being experienced. Dylan Trigg offers a similar experience when visiting a ruin for the first time; 'our immediate response is generally to seek orientation...ruined space appears for us as something to be experienced in a directional and qualitative way.'²⁰ The way the ruin affects us experientially, is a recurring theme throughout Trigg's texts and will be expanded on, in the literature review.

There is a marked and yet unfamiliar spatial awareness, now walking though and into the ruined Hall; this is characterized as the sensation of being both inside and outside at the same time. The roof of the Hall has long since disappeared, replaced by open sky and the canopy of trees that have taken root inside the building. Trigg talks of this inside and outside sensation as something that is an, 'essential character of being in the ruin'²¹ and that is manifested through the body as an 'embodied perspective'.²² In order to experience the juxtaposition of interior and exterior at the same time, the body is the vehicle for perceiving and subsequently determining spatial experience.²³

²⁰ Dylan Trigg, 'Architecture and Nostalgia in the Age of Ruin', (University of Bath), 15 January 2010.

https://www.academia.edu/208447/Architecture_and_Nostalgia_in_the_Age_of_Ruin, 2. (Accessed 7 December 2014), 2.

²¹ Dylan Trigg, 'Architecture and nostalgia in the Age of Ruin', 3.

²² Ibid, 3.

²³ Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 118.

Now inside the Hall, one is confronted by a massive open space of which used to be the once grand Hall (plate 9&10). The entire floor space of Nettleham Hall is now covered with rooted trees, crumbling and fallen stone, vines and uneven woodland floor. There is no clear distinction between the woodland floor that leads to the Hall and the interior floor of the Hall itself. The roof to Nettleham Hall was destroyed by fire, in 1937, and so answers for the advanced state of ruin; mature creeping vines and trees are growing inside the property at every turn (plate 11). Since the fire, over 70 years ago, nature has been allowed to grow and expand, unhindered. The constant presence of human activity has formed and shaped natural pathways throughout the Hall and surrounding woodland area.

Although in an advanced state of ruin, the building is huge, dressed in limestone; it is an impressive example of Georgian architecture, similar in style to nearby Riseholme Hall, which was built around the same time in the mid 18th century.²⁴ Without knowing what this place is, it is clear that it was a domestic dwelling. By walking around the space and through the many stone lintels that once held doors and archways, one can perceive the layout of a home. Just to the right side of the main entrance to the Hall, there are evident traces on the stonework where the doorbell would have been. The front side of the Hall also shows the remains of two large bay windows, situated on either side. There is the large kitchen at the rear of the property, with the remnants of an oversized fireplace and scattered remains of a cast iron oven range. Looking up to the sky, to where the second and third floor would have been, you can see small wrought iron fireplaces, jutting out of one of the many crumbling chimneybreasts.

This place was once a home, intact and lived in and that is what I first connected with and subsequently became the focal point for the research. In order to explore any depth of spatial experience and meaning of connectedness, it felt necessary to focus the research and practice at Nettleham Hall. Subsequent visits to the Lincoln Archive Centre provided photographs of the interior and exterior of the

²⁴ Both halls were originally built as homes, in the mid 18th century by the architect Francis Smith and were then extended in the mid 19th century by, different architects. <http://www.parksandgardens.org/places-and-people/site/2812/description> (accessed February 27 2015).

property whilst it was inhabited and provides evidence that it was home (plate 12&13). As poignant as it was to be able to view the fragile photographs of the late 19th and early 20th Century, as it had not been possible to until recently, it has not changed or altered the experience that I have with the current state of the ruin. Although I hold a fascination and appreciation of the history and meaning of this place, Nettleham Hall as a ruin, has to be seen and experienced as it is today, in order to fully understand and appreciate the sense of absence and spatial awareness that it presents.

Nettleham Hall will not remain standing in the long term and every visit sees more of the structure in heaps of limestone and brick rubble, on the woodland floor. There is no future or renewal for this ruin. It is testament to the decline of so many buildings of the same era, where many properties became too big to maintain, when families moved to the cities, or the rising housing tax on large properties forced families out. In completing this research and in creating an art installation as a response, the essence of Nettleham Hall may well remain standing for a while longer.

Chapter Two.

Literature Review

This literature review aims to identify key contemporary theoretical texts that address absence and spatial experience in the context of the ruin. This is because spatial experience within the ruin only emerged as a subject of interest and critical inquiry in the mid 20th century. Focusing on contemporary texts allows for an in depth investigation of current thinking. The review also acts as the bridge between research context and practice, reflection and response. It is deliberately positioned between chapter one; *Absence, spatial experience and the ruin*, which acts as a framework for the first part of the research question: *how is absence felt and experienced within the ruin*, and chapter three; *Lens based media as a communicator*, which is a visual response to the research and addresses the second part of the research question: *how does one communicate absence through the medium of lens based media*. The reason for positioning this review in between the research context and the practice, as a visual response; is to expand on current key texts that have already been identified and embedded throughout the thesis.

A Pivotal Text

The subject of ruins has produced an extensive array of text, the majority of it is produced for general reading and although this does provide a certain degree of understanding and context to the ruin, it does not provide a critical inquiry into the area. The subject of spatial experience however, has produced an eclectic variety of existing research into all manor of phenomenological thinking and placement of spatial experience. The most significant text to locate my research area is by philosopher and writer, Dylan Trigg. *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason* has proved pivotal, in helping me understand how we perceive and interact with the ruin in general and how I can then situate that experience into the specific setting of Nettleham Hall.

In chapter one, I investigated the meaning and significance of absence in relation to spatial experience within the ruin. I also questioned how it is recognized and registered within that space. It was suggested that absence is a feeling or felt sense that holds form and meaning within the phenomenological experience of the ruin. Absence is perceived through our consciousness, our bodies and in particular, the body's awareness of the senses. The texture of absence is felt through the body's reaction and interaction of spatial experience. This is crucial in understanding how lens based media might communicate this texture, reaction and interaction as a phenomenological inquiry.

To further situate the experience of absence at Nettleham Hall, the philosophically based text *The Aesthetics of Decay*, sets out to rationalize the spatial context of the ruin, by challenging progress as something that is rational. In short, Trigg suggests something that is rational is traditionally seen as progressive. However, the ruin is not traditionally seen as progressive and is therefore not rational and falls out of the scope of reason. Through the decline of reason, spatial order can be challenged. Trigg suggests that the modern ruin redefines progress by embodying decline, which is can be seen as progress itself. 'The ruin is the place of becoming, the place of truth, the place in which reason is absent and the Nothing is present'.²⁵ 'The Nothing is the dynamic between decline and silence.'²⁶ In referring to the Nothing, Trigg is not talking about absence as a separate entity; he encompasses absence into something that is more universal. 'Aesthetically, the Nothing is indistinguishable from the essence of the ruin.'²⁷ Our experience in the ruin is a combination of 'ontological time and subjective consciousness',²⁸ whilst we are experiencing the ruin we embody the Nothing. Trigg describes the Nothing as part of the essence of that particular space. Once we step inside the ruin, we embody the Nothing and the Nothing embodies us. Our bodies react physically with and emotionally to it; this reaction is felt through mediation of body with place. For Trigg, this is the culmination of spatial experience that is particular to the ruin.

²⁵ Dylan Trigg, *Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason*, (Peter Lang, 2006), 249.

²⁶ Dylan Trigg, *Aesthetics of Decay*, 242.

²⁷ Ibid. 242.

²⁸ Ibid. 242.

Trigg is essentially talking about absence here, as a part of the whole, the whole, being Nothing. His work is heavily influenced by the phenomenologically based theories of both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Stepping back chronologically, the philosophical idea of Hermeneutical research that Husserl proposed is that; in order to uncover the meaning of something, one has to experience it. He expressed the *Hermeneutical Circle* as, the whole is reflected in the parts, just as together, the parts, disclose the whole. Reflecting again on what Trigg writes ‘The Nothing is the dynamic between decline and silence,’²⁹ I would agree that absence is part of the essence of the ruin, the Nothing and the Whole; just as the Nothing, the Whole, discloses the parts; being absence and spatial experience, as mediated through the body.

Situating Phenomenological Ideas into Practice

Ruins: Documents of Contemporary Art has been produced in response to a selection of contemporary artists’ and critics’ reflections on the ruin/ruination. The editor for this text, Brian Dillon, has written extensively on the history of ruins and ruination in art and culture and this makes it significant for the study, because it offers a diverse source of visual arts that respond to the ruin, spatial experience in the ruin and absence. Throughout this anthology of reflections on the ruin, a modern view of the ruin is exposed. In the introduction to *Ruins: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Dillon sets out to situate decay and ruin, before examining contemporary art practices that ‘engage with an increasingly pluralistic environment’ and ‘an involution of perspective and timescales that addresses not just the past but also the future.’³⁰ The Pluralistic environment of the ruin that Dillon discusses includes experience of spatial awareness and time,

...the ruin is a site not of melancholy or mourning, its fragmentary, unfinished nature is an invitation to fulfill the as yet unexplored temporality that it contains. Ruins, as many of the artists surveyed and

²⁹ Dylan Trigg *Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason*, (Peter Lang, 2006), 242.

³⁰ Brian Dillon, introduction to, *The Ruin: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Brian Dillon (MIT Press, 2011), 18.

writers and critics excerpted here suggest, are freighted with possibility, even utopian promise.³¹

This anthology of reflection on the ruin has proved valuable in understanding how textual writing can communicate a reflective quality and situates phenomenological ideas into practice. It has led me the visual responses of artist and filmmakers, Tacita Dean, Jane and Louise Wilson, and photographer, Robert Polidori. Each has responded to ruin/ruination and spatial experience, by using photography and film as a communicator. I will analyze the practice of these artists in detail in the following chapter.

Our established relationship with a given spatial surrounding is not just confined to the body and awareness of the senses, we are also able to reflect and imagine. This is an important facet of the relationship between the research context and practice, and how it might mediate a holistic interpretation of the experience of Nettleham Hall, into an outcome that resonates through the body as well as the sub-conscious:

The human being is distinguished from other animals by the capacity of reflection and quality of human emotion and draws meaning from the body and mind but also from the experience of place in an interactive way: the whole environment influences the perception we have of it and in turn, we also influence the environment in a continuously dynamic interaction.³²

³¹ Brian Dillon, introduction to, *The Ruin: Documents of Contemporary Art*, edited by Brian Dillon (MIT Press, 2011), 18.

³² Maria João Durão, *Embodied Space: A Sensorial Approach to Spatial Experience*, Propulsion & Energy Sciences International Forum: SPESIF-2009. AIP Conference Proceedings, Volume 1103. AIP Conference Proceedings, Volume 1103, Issue 1, p.399-406. http://www.astrosociology.org/Library/PDF/Durao_SPESIF2009.pdf (accessed 15 January 2015)

Part Two

Chapter Three

Lens Based Media as a Phenomenological Inquiry: Contextual Analysis of Current Practice

This chapter discusses the ontological nature of lens based media in particular, the use of moving and still image and the phenomenology of it as a methodological approach to the encounter of absence, as experienced in the ruin. Lens based media has the capacity to communicate the visualization of a given object or situation, but this research goes further than viewing lens based media as a given and places it firmly within phenomenology and spatial experience. It also looks at how lens based media acts and reacts as a phenomenological and methodological approach to how absence emerges in the ruin and how this emergence is subsequently communicated into a visual form. Analysis of current practice, identify key areas of critical inquiry and various visual research strategies into the use of lens based media as a phenomenological method of inquiry that are relevant to this research study.

In addressing the second part of the research question, *how does one communicate absence through lens based media*, has been approached chiefly through Empirical study. By situating the body at the center of how we respond to the experience of absence, lens based media can then visually document and thus communicate that experience. Lens based media has the capacity to contribute a heightened sense of experiential quality of the ruin, through capturing and recording duration and time within a given space. In her seminal text, *On Photography*, Susan Sontag suggests photography's phenomenological ability to capture experience and that the camera acts as an extension of the body.³³ The still image, as well as the moving image response as an experiential inquiry is key to the communication of absence and the phenomenologically experienced ruin of Nettleham Hall in this research. It is the primary reason for

³³ John Berger, *About Looking*, (Bloomsbury, 1980), 53.

choosing lens-based media as essential methods of phenomenology and visual response to the ruin. It allows lens-based media to act as an experiential element of this research, from the perspective of making, into a corresponding and responsive art installation.

Lens based media acts is a visual trace, a communicator of time and duration. For the still image, it is a combination of light and duration of exposure to time, that determines a resulting image. That being said, my emphasis with the still image is not motivated by the technical capabilities of the camera, but from a more existential concern. In the text *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*, Kuhn and McAllister allude to photography, as seen by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kraucer as

... a visual technology, (that) raises existential and epistemological questions-questions about the nature of existence and about how we can know the world, questions about how photography can become implicated in our knowing the world.³⁴

Eugene Atget's Phenomenological Documents of: *Paris*

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, the photographer Eugene Atget made a series of photographic records of Paris. He 'refused to draw on established structures of seeing – bourgeois genres and aesthetic forms – and instead sought to generate new modes of perception.'³⁵ This can be seen as a phenomenological approach, communicated through photography and echoes what Trigg says about *being in the world*, in that, 'we are forever in the here, and it is from that, that our experiences take place.'³⁶ Photography can act as a communicator in how we know and interact with the world. The images of Paris by Atget are dense with experience and offer a visual response and interpretation of both past and present (plate 14).

³⁴ Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister. *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*. (Remapping Cultural History, Volume 4. Berghahn Books, 2006), 5.

³⁵ Kuhn and McAllister. *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*, 3.

³⁶ Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. (Ohio University Press, 2012), 4.

Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Seascapes* and *Movie Theatres*

Photography is also about duration, not in terms of the mechanical process of photography, but what duration alludes to. Traditionally the photograph is taken with a relatively short duration, such as Hiroshi Sugimoto's static depiction of the *Tyrrhenian Sea*, in the *Seascapes* series, (plate 15). On the other hand, duration might be extended, resulting in an image from the same series, (plate 16). Both examples show the camera's mechanical time of duration, but more significantly, both examples also communicate duration of time. This communication of time is what raises the complex question of the relationship between time and the photograph and thus highlights the fundamental nature of photography. The film theorist, Peter Wollen describes duration within a photograph as:

Images, may themselves appear punctual, virtually without duration, this does not mean that the situations that they represent lack any quality of duration or other qualities related to time.³⁷

Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto sees the photograph as an object in a state of becoming and crucially, in an experiential state. Sugimoto's large-scale photographs of *Movie Theatres* (plate 17) address persistence of time, as the photographs are achieved through long exposures. These exposures of cinema screens convey not only the time of duration, (the photographic exposure would last the length of the feature film), but Sugimoto more poignantly conveys duration of time within a single image. At first glance the image appears to be a traditional photograph of short duration, a still and clear image of an old style movie theatre with empty seats. However, this apparent stillness is juxtaposed, by the blindingly, bright white light of the cinema screen, which is only possible because of the long exposure. These photographs contrast, but only in a visual sense, the static *Seascapes*. Most of this series consists of long exposures, typical of Sugimoto's practice, where the *Seascapes* are blurred to the point where there is no defined horizon between the sea and sky. Both the series *Movie Theatres* and *Seascapes* evoke a sense of time that is a careful combination of the production of the image and the reception of the image, regardless of the

³⁷ Peter Wollon, *Fire and Ice*, (in Photographies, no 4. Paris, April 1984), 109.

mechanical time of duration. This provokes an understanding of time as becoming, an event and challenges the notion of photography as a static moment of the past. These photographs raise the complex question of the relationship between time and the photograph, which goes beyond temporality and thus highlights the fundamental nature of photography as a phenomenological expression of a given experience. The *Seascape* series by Sugimoto are a good example of spatial experience captured and framed into a single photograph.

Robert Polidori's: *Zones of Exclusion*

An example of the ontological nature of photography and notions of time and ruin, within a photograph, are the images by Robert Polidori, of Pripyat and Chernobyl (plate 18). In 2006, Polidori documented what was left, after one of the nuclear reactors at Chernobyl exploded, in 1986. A photographer of chiefly human habitats and environment, Polidori produces large-scale photographs that captures and tells of human experience. The rooms photographed at Chernobyl and nearby town of Pripyat, are shown as metaphors of lives past and traces of people, in a space that reveals the texture of absence, as captured by the camera. They invite the spectator to experience the feeling of being in that space.

The duration of time is an important facet in the reading and phenomenological understanding of the still image the same importance can be applied to moving image. Within my own practice for this research, I experimented with different lens based equipment and began filming at the Hall. It is important to point this out within this chapter, so as to position film making which acts in a similar context of visualizing absence and experience.

Tacita Dean's *Kodak 2006*

Filmmaker and critic Peter Wollen, alludes to film making as a visualizer of the *here and now*, where he describes 'photography as a point, film like a line.'³⁸ Film can be described as a sequence of movement; therefore it becomes more

³⁸Peter Wollen, *Fire and Ice*, (in Photographies, no 4. Paris, April 1984), 108.

synonymous to the notion of becoming. Siegfried Kraucer's well-known book, *The Theory of Film*, suggests that film is representative of reality, as it evolves in time, by use of separate images in a sequence.³⁹ In other words, in a cinematic film, time can be looked at simultaneously as past and present. As well as the still photograph, film is another way that communicates experience as it occurs. Tacita Dean's film piece, *Kodak, 2006* offers an effective use and treatment of filmmaking that is significant to translating the spatial experience of a defined space. The film also touches on the notion of ruin and how one can communicate a phenomenological experience and successfully translate that experience into a film piece.

Dean does not regard herself as a photographer, nor a filmmaker. She regards herself as an artist who uses photography and film in order to communicate her work. The deciding method of lens-based media with Dean's *Kodak 2006* for instance, is heavily reliant on the context of the film piece. Dean's choice of analogue over digital filmmaking is the fact that she chooses to use the material of film, which is now something of the past. Dean's work speaks of nostalgia, for technologies and artistic forms of the past, as a practice about to become obsolete. On discovering that the Kodak Corporation was about to cease production of black and white standard 16mm film, Dean purchased the last of the stock and filmed (using both black and white and colour film) the production process at the Kodak factory, in Chalon-sur-Saone, in France.⁴⁰ The result is a 44minute narrative that follows the making of celluloid film, as it runs through several miles of machinery. The film piece reflects on the fading medium of analogue film itself. What is important about this film piece and significant to how lens based media can communicate absence, and phenomenological experience, is the way in which Dean creates tension and movement within the film piece without any sort of action (plate 19).

³⁹ Siegfried Kraucer, *The Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. (Oxford University Press, 1960), 41.

⁴⁰ Brian Dillon, *Ruin Lust*, (Catalogue for the exhibition *Ruin Lust*, Tate Britain, 4 March – 18 May, Tate Publishing, 2014), 52.

When we think of a film, we might think of it as containing an establishing shot, have a beginning, a middle and an end. Dean's film *Kodak 2006* does not contain any of these common features associated to film; it is simply a day in the life of the factory. Rather than telling a story, Dean is showing a narrative that is slow to unravel. The first 35 minutes are concentrated on the production of celluloid film and is aesthetic in its approach. Much of this section of the film includes close up shots that are both abstract and monotonous. There is a real sense of duration and persistence of a technology, through repetition of image sequence. Throughout most of the film, the narrative is allowed to slowly unfold and reveals glimpses of human trace and absence. The last 10 minutes of the film encompasses a very different sense of the spatial experience of the factory in a negative way, which is perhaps testament to the decline of the factory and an industry that is coming into ruin. The rest of the film piece shows, quick successions of sequence, of broken furniture and rubbish scattered across much of the abandoned film packaging section (plate 20). The lighting is harsh and evokes a rather angry aesthetic and spatial experience to the first portion of the film, which is composed in its monotony and repetition.

Jane and Louise Wilson

Similar to the narrative of Dean's *Kodak, 2006*, are the photographs of Jane and Louise Wilson. Their phenomenologically lens based media both responds and reacts to uninhabitable and abandoned places. Through the communication of still photographs and film footage, the places in question, whether the remains of the Northern Ukrainian city, Pripyat, or (*Stasi City*) the headquarters of the former East-German secret police, the arts works created by Jane and Louise Wilson provide the viewer a way to inhabit and experience the uninhabitable. This is made possible through large-scale multi screened art installations. In the photographs of Pripyat, part of a series from: *Atomgrad (Nature Abhors a Vacuum)* series, and similar in one sense to Polidari's work, is that the remains of the town are exposed and 'laid bare'.⁴¹ Whereas Polidari focused his work around the subject of human trace and what is left behind at the nuclear site of

⁴¹ Guilian Bruno, *Modernist Ruins, Filmic Archaeologies*, 2003. Lost Sites of Power, Ruins: A Document of Contemporary Art, edited by Brian Dillon (MIT Press 2011), 77.

Chernobyl, the photographs of neighboring town *Pripyat* made by Jane and Louise Wilson, offer a further vision. Their photographs focus on public spaces such as; the hotel, cultural palace, library and swimming pool of the town. These places were part of the housing spaces for the workers of Chernobyl and seen as a contemporary community of the future. By placing in each image a yardstick, the artists' also place the body, into that space. The yardstick is also representative as a measuring scale, of radioactivity and the passage of time (plate 21).⁴²

Summary of Current Practice: into the Phenomenological Nature of Lens Based Media.

The film piece by Tacita Dean and photographs by, Jane and Louise Wilson, allude to the ontological nature of lens based media, as a phenomenological response in its making, visualizing and subsequent viewing. The series, *Seascapes* and *Movie Theatres* by Hiroshi Sugimoto, challenges the traditional idea that the photograph is a static moment, such as Barthes' theory of the *Punctum*, where the photograph is seen as a temporal hallucination, a product of something that "is not there", "but it has indeed been".⁴³ Sugimoto sees the photograph as an event evolving, or time as becoming. It is also the signifier of phenomenological experience, similar to Polidari's large-scale photographs, which also signify and embody spatial experience. This further alludes to the photograph as a phenomenological sense of being in the here and now and thus embodying a lived and spatial experience.

⁴² DCA Dundee, 'interview with Jane and Louise Wilson', YouTube. Online video clip, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wm4vl6DhUXY> (accessed February 27 2015)

⁴³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 2000. (Published by Vintage. First translated by Hill & Wang, 1981), 115.

Chapter Four

Lens Based Media Practice: a Phenomenological Inquiry into the Investigation of Absence

This chapter is a reflective commentary of the lens based media practice carried out at the ruin of Nettleham Hall, which is shaped through from a phenomenological and ethnographic account, that documents the experience of absence as it occurred and the practice methods used to capture that experience. Through its ontology and extension of the body response, the representational nature and technology of lens based media, has contributed an essential and analogous response to the direct and felt experience of absence and phenomenological seeing of the ruin.

Choosing the Ruin

As part of the initial investigative process, I visited a number of ruins including: industrial, urban, rural and *arrested*. To form a convincing rationale of choosing one site where the practice and experience of absence would take place, it felt necessary to investigate a variety of spaces beforehand. The option of basing myself at a number of ruined spaces would have produced interesting but fragmented results and would not have provided a suitable, nor cohesive environment, for the corresponding art installation, that I had in mind.

Early in the process of observing, photographing and filming different sites, the significance of the dissemination was informing the way I captured the spaces as I was experiencing them. This level of inter-connectedness between practice and installation became routine. As I became aware of and experienced absence, I found I was able to remove myself from just making objective decisions, of how to operate the mechanical practices of still and moving image and instead, allowed space, absence and experience, inform the practice and process of making.

In the book *About Looking*, John Berger refers to photography as something that is capable of achieving the 'Now', if it is created in the right context.⁴⁴

In chapter one, I referred to the experiential difference between the *evolving* ruin and the *arrested* ruin. I suggested that the former, still *evolving* offers an experience of being in the here and now; whereas the latter, the *arrested ruin*, 'is outside of our time'⁴⁵ and does not offer the same level of experience of absence, due to its continuous preservation against further decay. *Kirby Hall*⁴⁶ for instance is a former Elizabethan country house, now owned by English Heritage (plate 22). Apart for an appreciation of the space and its history, I did not feel a connection or a sense of absence here. Heritage owned ruins are also frequented by a large number of tourists and display signage; these play a substantial part in the disconnection of sense awareness and body experience of absence, towards the space. Sites of an urban and industrial nature, were also observed, experienced and captured by still and moving image. Still in a state of evolving and unfolding, they did provide a rich experience for the senses and absence. However, I choose not to use these locations because of factors, such as; restricted access, regeneration, dangerous conditions and in some cases, partial collapse or demolition of the site (plate 23&24).

In reflecting on the sites that I experienced and captured, it reinforced the need to find a suitable location, where I felt a connection with and was able to access. I have visited the ruin of Nettleham Hall countless times over the past six years and am familiar with the place and space. It is set within a secluded rural setting and is readily accessible. I felt a connection to this place, which I was not fully aware of at the start, but as I observed the space more the connection was *home*. In his seminal text *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard refers to *home*, as a shelter, and suggests that

⁴⁴ John Berger, *About Looking*, (2009 Edition, by Bloomberg. First published in 1980, by Writers & Readers Publishing Group), 65.

⁴⁵ Dylan Trigg, 'Architecture and Nostalgia in the Age of Ruin', (University of Bath), 15 January 2010.
https://www.academia.edu/208447/Architecture_and_Nostalgia_in_the_Age_of_Ruin, 2. (Accessed 7 December 2014), 6.

⁴⁶ Kirby Hall is located in Corby, Northamptonshire.

The House, quite obviously, is a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values of inside space, provided, of course, that we take it in both its unity and its complexity, and endeavor to integrate all the special values in one fundamental value.⁴⁷

The connection of what *house* and *home* means to me, made it important for the research study, to base the phenomenological and lens based media experience here.

On Location at: Nettleham Hall

Through the course of observing, photographing and filming various spaces, in and around the Hall, four areas in particular became central to the experience of absence and lens based media inquiry: the dining room, front entrance, kitchen ceiling and the narrow path that leads to the Hall. Through regular reflection *on action*,⁴⁸ I discovered that I kept returning to these spaces. These areas resonated a particularly strong sense of awareness of absence and spatiality. The reason for this was my interest in what these particular spaces were used for and the connection they offered. Interestingly, the areas of the Hall that became central to the experience of absence and lens based media inquiry, were in essence the public spaces. These areas in particular were a regular cycle of activity, for the inhabitants of Nettleham Hall. This is similar in one respect to the resonance portrayed in the photographs of public spaces at *Chernobyl* by Robert Polidori and the public spaces of *Pripyat*, by Jane and Louise Wilson, which act as metaphors of past lives and traces of people. There is a real sense of the texture of absence in these spaces and existential presence.

The: Dining Room

Reflecting on the photographs of Sugimoto and Polidori and the film pieces of Dean and Jane and Louise Wilson, I experimented with the still and moving image. I allowed myself to freely decide what media to use depending on the experience I was having at a given time. In the *Dining Room* for instance, I

⁴⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans by Maria Jolas. (Beacon Press, 1994), 3.

⁴⁸ This is where the researcher reflects on the practice made is able to respond and develop further.

initially made still images of the space, but soon began to film. I found that the experience of absence was more visceral to the awareness of the senses, through being recorded in this way. The camera was set up and left to record the far side of the room where the wall is partially covered in ivy, with exposed wooden batons and plaster. The large windowless frames let the sunlight in, only at certain times of the day and only at a certain angle. The sun and wind from outside this space creates the dappled light effect as well as the movement of ivy on the walls. This interaction with the elements and architecture offered a privileged and heightened sense of absence and calmness, the camera was able to record the here and now. The camera is statically positioned yet the continuous recording traces the stillness of the architecture and at the same time the movement of the organic growth around it. Similar to Dean's *Kodak, 2006* film, there is no beginning, middle or end. The film recording is a narrative of spatial experience where time is still unfolding (plate 25).

Whilst experiencing and filming this space, it allowed me to consider the value of the art installation, which would connect the physical site of the Hall to the experience of it. Scale became an important factor; to feel the connection of being there in the space, it became apparent that I would need to produce a large-scale screen that was approximate in size to the original space.

The: Front Entrance

Until recently, the front entrance to the Hall was the most intact and preserved space. Much of the heavy canopy of ivy covering the entrance surrounding was protecting the architecture from the elements. Many of the established roots of ivy have taken root in between cracks and large crevices of stonework, in the few months between photographing this area and now, the heaviness of the ivy and other organic matter, have pulled down parts of the structural framework, (plate 26). It is a further testament to the nature of the evolving ruin.

The sheer scale of the architecture of the front entrance is arresting; it is roughly 5 meters in height. I decided at an early stage to photograph this space as a still image, with as much detail as my camera could afford. The scale of the space and

sense of absence felt would communicate and resonate best by installing an equally large-scale still image. The reason for choosing the still image over film footage was to impart a way into the building, through the entrance, allowing the spectator a way past and into the interior of the Hall. It would also allow the viewer interaction by touching, seeing and feeling the fine detail that the image represents (plate 27).

The: Kitchen Ceiling

Although this was not included in the installation, it still features as a significant part of the ontology of lens based media as a phenomenological inquiry into the experience of absence. The *kitchen ceiling* in reality is an opening to the sky above (plate 28). Looking up to where the ceiling would have been there is evidence of two further floors and then, open sky. There were many elements in this room, which presented a particular sense of spatial awareness and absence, such as the large tree that had taken root inside the building. The decision to focus on the *ceiling* presented another facet of the buildings' present state and offering of absence. The intention was to project either a still image or static film piece, (similar to that of the *Dining Room*) onto the ceiling of the installations' location. However, after testing this and reflecting on the scale of material that I already had accumulated, I decided to omit this piece because it would not have offered the viewer the presence and scale that it needed for an entire experience. The omission of *The Kitchen Ceiling*, in the installation is further expanded on in the following chapter.

The: Path to the Hall

The narrow path that now leads to the Hall did not exist, in the time that the Hall was used as a home. From the main gates this area would have been used regularly, but as a graveled driveway leading to the Hall and landscaped gardens on either side.⁴⁹ It is the path in its present state that resonates a sense of absence

⁴⁹ Although there are no photographs to evidence this, one could postulate that beyond the double entrance gates, there would have been access for horse and cart and in later years, a motor vehicle.

and passage of time; this was the reason for choosing the path, as part of the installations' experience. The path to reach the Hall has been created and has evolved over a slow period of time, by countless footprints over the course of 70 years since the hall was destroyed by fire, in 1937. These desire lines⁵⁰ have been made in order to reach the Hall, to experience the space in and around the Hall. It felt necessary to include the path in the installation as a way of making the journey that is an experience in itself. Originally, the path and surrounding woodland area was photographed as a series of still images (plate 29). I intended to project these images (using various projectors) onto a self-supporting *tunnel*, made of stretch fabric, which would offer an experiential journey to the Hall. After testing this, I felt that the density of the images together with the density of the tunnel, as a felt experience, failed to communicate the 'real' experience of that journey. Although the original path is narrow: it is dense with trees, branches and ivy, it does offer a very exposed and tactile experience, where one can peer through trees and see other areas of the surrounding woodland. This failure led to a complete rethink of the value of the path, the absence experienced and the importance of needing a journey to reach the Hall.

The decision of omitting the photographic images of the path altogether, led to a more lucid approach of how to communicate the exposed and tactile nature of the journey to the Hall. It also provided more emphasis on the large-scale still image of the *Front Entrance* and the film piece of the *Dining Room*. Throughout this process the camera has acted as an extension of my body response, to the experiences at the Hall, as I have embodied them. The camera has acted as an observational and analogous response to the textured experience of being in and around the ruined space of the Hall. To further locate lens based media as an extension of body response and a communicator of experience in the ruin the resulting art installation further asserts the lived experience as an interconnecting part of the whole.

⁵⁰ Desire lines, are created by human and animal footprints over a period of time, they offer new trajectories. Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands, Journeys into England's True Wilderness*. (Vintage, 2012), 23.

Chapter Five

The: Art Installation

This chapter is a reflective commentary of the art installation, which took place at Hackthorn Village Hall. It acts as a final response and embodiment of the observations and lens based media responses at Nettleham Hall. This chapter will first address the meaning and nature of the art installation before locating and contextualizing it as a continuum of the experience, moving and still image of absence, for this research study.

What is art installation?

Art installation involves the installation or placement of objects in a space, where the entirety of the objects within that space, comprise the artwork. Usually installed on the site where it will be exhibited, art installations can incorporate physical features of the site, or simply exist within the space of the chosen site. The significance of the art installation is in the experience that it offers the viewer. Installation artist, Bonnie Mitchell suggests that '(installations) take into account viewers entire sensory experience. Installation art reflects and responds to the world we live in.'⁵¹ Ronald Onorato further suggests in the book: *Blurring the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969-1996* that

The aesthetic power of installation art does not reside in a singular, commodified object but in an ability to become, rather than merely represent, the continuum of real experience by responding to specific situations.⁵²

The significance of: The Art Installation

⁵¹ Bonnie Mitchell, *The Immersive Artistic Experience and the Exploitation of Space*, (CAT, London Conference, February 3 2010), http://www.bcs.org/upload/pdf/ewic_ca10_s3paper2.pdf (accessed on 15 January 2015), 101.

⁵² Ronald J Onorato. *Blurring the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969-1996*, (Marquand, 1997), 8.

In the previous chapter, photography was located as an analogous response to absence, as a felt experience. The camera acted as an experiential extension, of body experience. The art installation has the capacity to further embody this, by drawing together the inter-connected parts that were made at the location of Nettleham Hall: *The Dining Room* film piece, *The Front Entrance* still photograph and the *Path* to the hall, into a holistic environment, in which the experience of absence, further exists and unfolds.

Reacting directly to lens based media as a phenomenological inquiry into an experiential encounter, Jane and Louise Wilson's *A Free an Anonymous Monument*, corresponding art installation, consists of both still and moving image, multi screened and multi dimensional in size (plate 30). The project itself is about the legacy of modernist architecture, set within a post-industrial landscape of North East England. The installation is carefully choreographed to convey a complex and troubled history of urban regeneration.⁵³ It features multiple, large-scale screens, for the display of looping film pieces and still photographs, at differing angles of juxtaposition, height and size. It also conveys the psychology of architectural and technological waste. A recurring feature of Jane and Louise Wilsons' work is that lens based media as an observational tool, connects architecture, to spatial experience and time. The installation of their work, often includes, multiple points of reference and experience; it becomes an essential inter-connecting part, of the practice.

In a similar fashion, photographer Fiona Crisps' large-scale installations, explore the relationship between the phenomenology of photography and the space experienced. *Negative Capacities: The Stourhead Cycle, 2012*, was an English Heritage commissioned work, where Crisp was asked to explore the nature of the historic house and gardens of Stourhead, in Wiltshire. The installation removes the gallery as a traditional plane of a walled exhibition of photographs and instead positions each of the eight, large-scale glazed and framed photographs, on a single scaffolding pole, within the space of the gallery (plate 31). This

⁵³ Guilian Bruno, *Modernist Ruins, Filmic Archaeologies*, 2003. Lost Sites of Power, Ruins: A Document of Contemporary Art, edited by Brian Dillon (MIT Press 2011), Pg76

deliberate action by Crisp created a new, temporary architecture of the gallery interior and allowed the viewer a more spatial and visceral experience of the work. The connection between the installation and practice was to, offer the spectator, a new way of looking and experiencing the house and gardens of Stourhead.

On reflection, a brief review and analysis of the meaning and significance of art installation has facilitated in placing it as an essential inter-connecting part of the whole, to the experience of absence at the ruin of Nettleham Hall. The following section of this chapter documents the meaning and significance the art installation as a dissemination of lens based media and phenomenological inquiry, for this research study.

Throughout my time at Nettleham Hall, body awareness to the environment and absence encountered there, lens based media as an act of making and creating, developed and responded directly to that experience. An awareness of the art installation as a continuum became an essential part of the observation of the Hall and practice, as it occurred. The choice of location for the installation was carefully considered in the planning of environment and large-scale works. It felt necessary to install the work in a space that considered natural light, existing architecture and height. This approach to the location allowed me to avoid the *white cube*, associated with the traditional gallery space and open up the possibilities for spatial experience.⁵⁴

Hackthorn Village Hall: The Location for the Installation

Having had previous knowledge of the space at Hackthorn Village Hall, I felt that the installation would work here. It is also located only ten minutes away from the ruin of Nettleham Hall and so holds certain significance for me. The village hall is a converted barn and offered the height and size that I would require. Inside the main hall are two windows, located high above the floor and offered the opportunity to utilize, or obscure. The space is used regularly as a village hall;

⁵⁴ Ronald J Onorato. *Blurring the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969-1996*, (Marquand, 1997), Pg16.

there is an existing small stage at one end, and signage throughout, which one would expect to find, in a publicly used venue. The reuse of this space as a temporary place for the installation of Nettleham Hall became at times, a challenging, yet strong sense of how any existing space can be transformed into an entirely different experience.

The: Path to the Hall

This element of the installation has been the most problematic component of the process. It felt necessary to create a journey or path, leading to the Hall, where the journey is as much part of the experience of absence, as the Hall itself. The original intention was to create a narrow self-supporting *tunnel*, made of white stretch fabric and project (using a series of projectors, located on the exterior of the tunnel) still images of the woodland, onto the tunnel. After testing this, it was immediately apparent that it was not going work. The fabric of the tunnel was extremely heavy, not just in terms of physical weight, but crucially it did not offer an analogous experiential feeling of walking through the woodland path. After many further attempts and failures of using different materials, such as; bamboo, willow, branches and twigs, to create a path to the Hall, I decided on cutting the existing white stretch fabric (originally for the tunnel) into thin strips of approximate lengths equal to the height of the tree canopy, of the original path. These strips were then tied at one end, to a thin web of green braided line; the web represented the canopy of the woodland, for the tied ends of the fabric strips, which acted as further representation of the canopy. The fabric strips were placed next to each other in parallels of three rows, to create some density of woodland, but also allowed gaps. It was essential to the experience that the viewer was allowed to peer through the gaps at any point and into different spaces of the installation. This also allowed the viewer to interact with the path and diverge off the path, by walking through the small gaps between the fabric strips, at any point. The path became an ephemeral trace of the original path and so provided the rationale for using the lightness and weightlessness of white fabric strips (plate 32).

The path required some form of lighting to represent dappled sunlight that appears intermittently in sections of the path. One small lamp was used in a far corner of the room, just outside of the immediate course of the path; the second light source, opposite the first light source, was gained from utilizing one of the windows, partially covered, from the exterior of the building, with dark material which allowed for movement of wind and intermittent sunlight to pass through the window and onto the path. At the end of the path, the space opens up to the four suspended fabric panels that comprise *The Front Entrance* to Nettleham Hall.

The: Front Entrance

At the time of experiencing and photographing the front entrance, it felt necessary to represent the still image acquired, as approximate in size as the original front entrance, of four meters in height. As well as creating a phenomenological experience of absence and space, the image itself was also intended to act as an entrance and therefore required consideration in its delivery. I found that digital printing onto fabric was a possibility and offered a way to present the entrance as an entity as well as an entry point. Through trial and error of printing onto different materials, the sheerest and lightest fabric available offered the result needed for installation. The outcome was the still image of the front entrance, cut into four equal, four metre vertical panels. The reason for separating the image into separate panels was to allude to the *interior* and *exterior* experience of the Hall, as referred to in chapter one. The panels were each suspended from transparent fishing line to the ceiling, next to each other and a foot apart in distance. This offered the image to appear as a single image from one angle and fragmented from other angles. The distancing was to offer the viewer different ways through the entrance, much like the multiple ways of entering the original space. Viewing the panels from the front, created a fragmented image, due to the large-scale film screen behind the panels. Parts of the image on the panels appeared opaque, whereas other parts appeared translucent. This deliberate action was to allude to the fragmentary and fragility of the structure as well as a sense of absence. By using sheer fabric, the panels could be viewed from the reverse, which offered a more opaque view of the

entrance, because of the low density of light caused by the partially covered window and single lamp that was directed onto the path. By suspending the panels in the center of the space, it allowed the viewer ample space in which to walk through and around the panels, obscuring the line between installation and real experience (plate 33).

The: Dining Room

The dining room was filmed as a static piece of footage, with the intention of looping the film, together with the audio of nature specific to the environment of Nettleham Hall, looping of the film piece allowed for a continuous narrative of absence as it was being experienced. Similar to the approximate scale of the *Front Entrance*, I also felt it necessary to apply the same sense of scale to the film piece. Therefore, a large wooden frame was constructed and painted white, to house the (5metre by 3metre) fabric screen (made from the same material as the path). The film was projected from the rear, removing traces of technology required for this part of the installation (plate 34). The projector did display a *hotspot*, which would normally be avoided, because it can interfere with the quality and viewing of rear projection, however, the rationale was to keep it as a signifier of the presence of the sun, through the cracks in the walls.

The Sounds: of Nettleham Hall

In addition to our awareness of the senses, sound in particular, enriches our experience of the world around us. Through our hearing, sounds in architecture such as the richness of amplified sound in a theatre, ‘can increase the intensity of its perception.’⁵⁵ It felt necessary to introduce the natural sound of the environment of Nettleham Hall, to the installation experience, rather than introduce audio that is not associated with the Hall. The sound, made by specialist equipment, was conducted at the time of my encounter with the Hall and is made up predominantly of birdsong, local to that area. The recording was

⁵⁵ Panagiotis Hadjiphilippou, ‘The Contribution of the Five Senses Towards the Perception of Space’. Academia.edu, (January 2013). Chapter 4: Sensual Projects. https://www.academia.edu/2460561/The_contribution_of_the_five_human_senses_towards_the_perception_of_space_by_Panagiotis_Hadjiphilippou (accessed 20 January 2015)

made during early mornings of the summer, over a period of two years. It resulted in a rich array of birdsong and additional sound of wind, trees and small animal activity. The inclusion of this environmental sound was crucial in drawing together the inter-connected parts of the experience, into an entirety.

The: Installation as an Entirety

On entering the open, double doors to the main room of the village hall, one is confronted by a series of white fabric strips, hanging from high above the head, to the ground and the sound of birdsong. There is a narrow path to the immediate right, created by countless vertical suspended strips. The path winds its way along; there are small gaps, here and there, through the strips, suggesting alternative ways and views into the space beyond. The birdsong is louder, halfway through the path; the intermittent light from above and below, creates a dappled effect all around. The vertical strips that comprise the path are soft to the touch; at the end, there is a wide opening that leads to four vertical panels of sheer fabric, suspended from the ceiling. The image on the panels consists of the front entrance to Nettleham Hall; there is space to walk through and around the panels; experiencing a new sense of scale, absence and a spatial awareness of the environment as whole, differing from that of the path.

Beyond the vertical panels is a large-scale screen, using the full width of the, room. The film piece is a static view of the dining room. It is presented as an entire section of the dining room, where the floor of the room presented, is in line with the floor of the installation space. The film piece is on a continuous loop, the movement of ivy and dappled sunlight juxtaposes the stillness of the fragmented architecture of the room.

The combination of, film footage, still image, audio and path, have created an experience of being there in the ruin of Nettleham Hall. The absence is felt through the body and awareness of the senses; one is transported to the space of the Hall, through the experience of the installation, in its entirety.

Chapter Six

Research Evaluation and Conclusions

The original motivation driving this research study was to explore the phenomenological possibilities of lens based media. As a practitioner I am interested in how lens based media interacts and reacts to experience. A long-standing fascination with the ruin prompted the two elements of practice and place to form a framework for this research study. The result was to investigate how the ruin affects us in an experiential way, how our bodies respond to the ruin and absence and how that occurrence is then visualized through lens-based media into a tactile and holistic experience. By adopting a Phenomenological approach, the core elements of enquiry being: absence, as a felt experience: lens based media as an extension and visualization of body experience and finally art installation, as a continuum; have evolved into an artifact of inter-connecting parts. I will immediately acknowledge that although this might appear to argue in favor of the research study, which it does to a point, I do recognize that there is scope for further investigation into the relationships of the core elements of this research study.

How is absence felt and experienced within the ruin: how does one communicate absence through lens-based media and subsequently translate that communication through art installation?

In order to answer this question and firmly position lens-based media as a method of phenomenological enquiry, a medium which has the capacity to visualize absence as experienced at the ruin of Nettleham Hall, it was essential to first analyze the meaning and significance of each core element in turn (for the purposes of understanding their values to this study), as well as conducting experiential investigations and their value to the study.

This evaluation recognizes that the research study is broadly interpretative, but outlines the importance of phenomenology as an enquiry; to uncover the meaning of something, it is necessary to experience it, as suggested by Merleau-Ponty.⁵⁶

In part one of the thesis, observation and analysis helped this study to understand the fundamental meanings of absence, ruin and how we experience these elements in direct relation to each other. As suggested by Trigg, an experience of absence particular to the ruin is offered by a very real, tactile and textural nature.⁵⁷ A literature review provided a crucial discourse into the nature of phenomenology and how phenomenological ideas, can be situated into practice. In particular, Trigg's text *The Aesthetics of Decay* provided a context for the rationalization of absence, within the spatial context of the ruin. In part two of the thesis, an analysis of lens based media as a phenomenological enquiry, examined the significance of it for this research study and explored the importance of the medium as practiced by others. It was suggested that lens based media has the capacity to contribute to a heightened sense of experiential quality of the ruin, through capturing and recording duration of time. In favor of this, Susan Sontag refers to photography's phenomenological ability to capture experience and that the camera acts as an extension of the body.⁵⁸ From this point of orientation, selected works by Jane and Louise Wilson, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Robert Polidori, were examined and positioned as; photographs that acted as signifiers of phenomenological experience. The photograph was recognized as an embodiment of lived and spatial experience. The importance of including moving image and its salient phenomenological position to the photograph (the still image) was analysed through the film piece *Kodak 2006* by Tacita Dean, which provided further reference to the ontological nature of moving image as a phenomenological response to its making and subsequent viewing.

⁵⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans by Colin Smith (London & New York: Routledge, 2006) 282.

⁵⁷ Dylan Trigg, 'Architecture and Nostalgia in the Age of Ruin', (University of Bath), 15 January 2010.
https://www.academia.edu/208447/Architecture_and_Nostalgia_in_the_Age_of_Ruin, (accessed 7 December 2014), 2.

⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2002), 22.

Through contextualizing the core elements of this research, it has served to position the practice as a continuum of phenomenological inquiry. Providing ethnographic accounts of Nettleham Hall as a ruin: the practice, as it occurred there and the installation as a response, was a risk of potentially undermining the arguments put forth in this thesis, but I would argue that it is crucial for the understanding and significance of the phenomenological value that this research is based on. Additionally, this approach aims to give the reader an essence of the experiential encounters, as they happened.

The observational encounters at Nettleham Hall directly influenced the photography and moving image that was made there. This Empirical approach allowed myself, the subject, as the primacy of perception and the camera, an extension of that perception. It is important to point out that the lens-based media made on site, was also influenced by the eventual art installation. This provided a more holistic and hermeneutical approach to the process. It recognized the whole is reflected in the parts, just as together the parts reveal the whole.

Finding a suitable venue for the art installation was paramount. It felt important to maintain the characteristics of exposed architecture and space, as well as consideration of scale, that the final works were composed of. Hackthorn Village Hall provided the space and tactile nature, the installation required. The venue was offered for a period of four days. This short space of time in which to, erect, show and disassemble the installation, initially presented a multitude, of concerns. The short length of the installation however (a day and an evening), was in favor of the nature of the ruin and refers to the title of the installation and thesis as: *Perpetual Transitions*. The constant change that the ruin faces and truth of entropy, is highlighted with a *Pop Up*⁵⁹ style installation.

⁵⁹ The feature of the *pop-up* exhibition is that they come and go in a short space of time, and typically appear in places not usually associated with art exhibitions. They can possess an element of surprise for the viewer, altering the experience of seeing it. Pop-up galleries often emerge in empty spaces, or spaces used for other purposes. They expand the available space for artists to show their work, and give artists a curatorial control. (Sally Pollak, *Pop-Up Galleries: a Growing Trend in Burlington's Art Scene*, Burlington Free Press.com, March 2013)
<http://archive.burlingtonfreepress.com/article/20130331/ARTS/303310001/Pop-up-galleries-A-growing-trend-in-Burlington-s-arts-scene> (accessed February 27 2015).

Consideration of time in erecting the installation was achieved to a level of success, by preparing materials beforehand and conducting a number of *dry runs*, prior to the final set up. However, admissions must be made on my inexperience of installation practice. A miscalculation of the dimensions for the built frame (for the large screen projection) made it impossible to fit the 16:9 ratio of the recorded film piece. The projection was readjusted to fit the dimensions of the frame, however, the projected piece was slightly zoomed in and did not offer the full dimensional view of *The Dining Room*. This is an admission that although viewers at the installation were unaware of, it is important to point out, as it illustrates the challenges and mishaps of choreographing and curating an experiential space.

During the opening of the installation to the public, a number of surprise elements occurred. I was interested to see how the viewer reacted and interacted with the space of the installation. A number of viewers did not choose to walk through the path, instead they, found other ways through. This observation defines and highlights, how differently we each consider space. The installation was presented in such a way, that the viewer had multiple ways of interacting and moving around the space. I observed viewers sitting on the floor, in front of *The Dining Room* projection. In addition, many viewers touched the fabric strips of *The Path* as they walk through, as well as the fabric panels of *The Front Entrance*. These observations are critical in outlining the necessity for the photography conducted at Nettleham Hall, to be presented as an installation, a continuum of the felt and tactile experience. Omissions and admissions have been made (the omission of the film piece of *The Kitchen Ceiling* and the technical miscalculation of *The Dining Room*), not as suggestions of failure, but rather highlights the challenges that were encountered and reconsidered.

In conclusion, this research study has produced a holistic and salient art installation that encompasses the core elements and values of the phenomenological enquiry. It transcends the hermeneutical approach by embracing these elements into an embodied experience within itself. Although there is level of success to the results of this enquiry, I feel that I have only touched the surface. This research makes recommendations for further inquiries

into the phenomenological field and positioning of lens-based media as an experiential enquiry. In the process of this study a significant amount of material has been made at various ruined sites, including urban and industrial. Further experiential investigations into these spaces, including more emphasis on location based sound recordings, will provide a deeper examination of absence, lens based media as a phenomenological inquiry and the art installation as a continuum of that experience, into further inquiry and debate.

Illustrations.

(Plate 1)



Nettleham Hall, 2014. Photograph by author, ©Clementine Monro

(Plate 2)



Nettleham Hall, *Before the Fire*, circa 1929. Courtesy of Canon Larken.
(Reference LARKEN/8/2. Lincoln Archive Centre)

(Plate 3)



Nettleham Hall, *Post Fire*, circa 1937. Courtesy of Canon Larken. (Reference LARKEN/8/2. Lincoln Archive Centre)

(Plate 4)



Nettleham Hall, *Post Fire*, circa 1950. Courtesy of Canon Larken. (Reference LARKEN/8/2. Lincoln Archive Centre)

(Plate 5)



Nettleham Hall, *Front Entrance*, 2013. Photography by author ©Clementine Monro,

(Plate 6)



Wrought Iron Gates and Pillars to Nettleham Hall. 2012. Photograph by author,
©Clementine Monro

(Plate 7)



Dilapidated Cottage, 2014. Photograph by author, ©Clementine Monro

(Plate 8)



Front Entrance, with remains of wooden doorframe. 2013. Photograph by author,
©Clementine Monro

(Plate 9)



The Grand Hall, Courtesy of Canon Larken. (Reference LARKEN/8/2. Lincoln Archive Centre)

(Plate 10)



The Grand Hall, 2014, Photograph by author, ©Clementine Monro

(Plate 11)



The Kitchen, Nettleham Hall. 2013 Photograph by author, ©Clementine Monro.

(Plate 12)



Nettleham Hall, circa 1929. Courtesy of Canon Larken. (Reference LARKEN/8/2. Lincoln Archive Centre)

(Plate 13)



*Nettleham Hall, front entrance, circa 1925. Courtesy of Canon Larken.
(Reference LARKEN/8/2. Lincoln Archive Centre)*

(Plate 14)



Cour, 7, Rue de Valence, 1922 ©Eugene Atget

(Plate 15)



Tyrrhenian Sea, 1980. ©Hiroshi Sugimoto

(Plate 16)



Pacific Ocean, Iwate. 1986. ©Hiroshi Sugimoto.

(Plate 17)



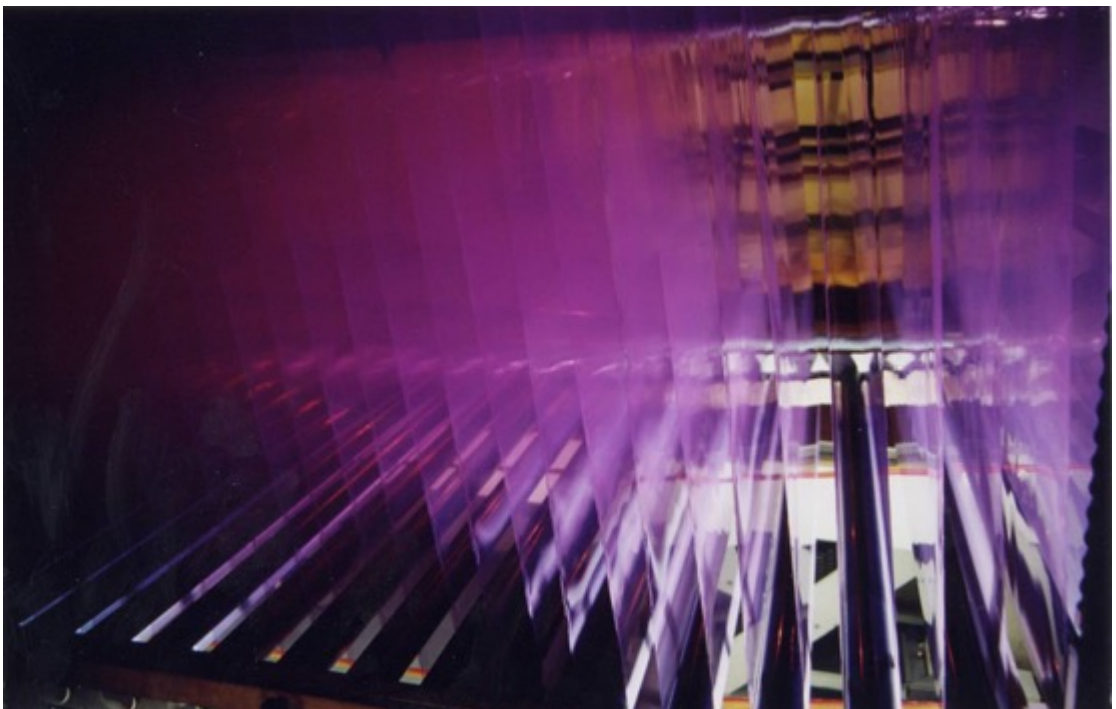
Trylon Theatre, NYC. 1976. ©Hiroshi Sugimoto

(Plate 18)



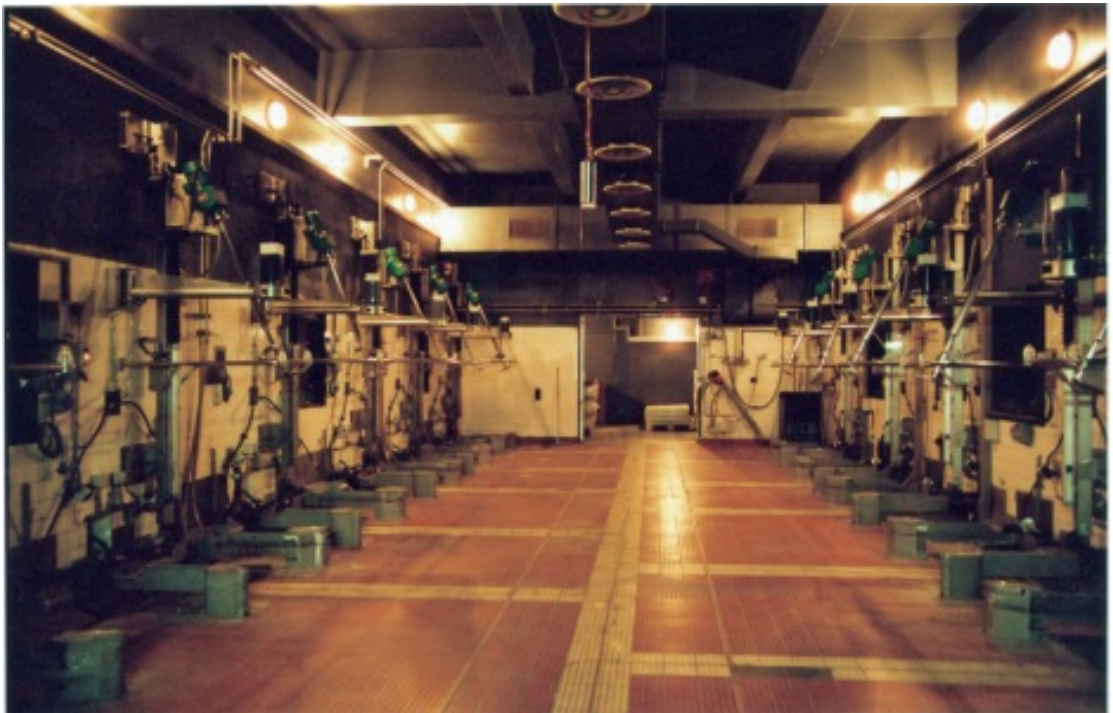
Unit 4, Control Room. Chernobyl. 2006. ©Robert Polidori.

(Plate 19)



Kodak, 2006. Film Still. 2006. ©Tacita Dean.

(Plate 20)



Kodak 2006. Film Still. 2006. ©Tacita Dean.

(Plate 21)



Metal Beds, From Nature Abhors a Vacuum. 2010. ©Jane and Louise Wilson.

(Plate 22)



Kirby Hall, 2012. Photograph by author, ©Clementine Monro

(Plate 23)



Maternity Ward, Nocton RAF Hospital, 2012. Photograph by author,
©Clementine Monro

(Plate 24)



Buxton Lime Firms, After demolition, 2012. Photography by author
©Clementine Monro

(Plate 25)



The Dining Room. Film Still. ©Clementine Monro

(Plate 26)



The Front Entrance, Nettleham Hall, September 2014. Photograph by author
©Clementine Monro

(Plate 27)



*The Front Entrance, Nettleham Hall, May 2014. Photograph by author
©Clementine Monro*

(Plate 28)



The Kitchen Ceiling, Nettleham Hall, 2013. Photograph by author, ©Clementine Monro

(Plate 29)



Path to the Hall, Photograph by author ©Clementine Monro

(Plate 30)



A Free and Anonymous Monument. Art Installation. 2010. ©Jane and Louise Wilson.

(Plate 31)



Negative Capacities: The Stourhead Cycle, 2012. ©Fiona Crisp.

(Plate 32)



The Path to the Hall, 2015. Photograph of Installation view, by author
©Clementine Monro

(Plate 33)



The Front Entrance, 2015. Photograph of Installation view, by author
©Clementine Monro

(Plate 34)



The Dining Room, 2015. , Photograph of Installation view, by author
©Clementine Monro

Perpetual Transitions: A Communication Between Lens Based Media and
Absence Within the Spatial Experience of the Ruin and how this Translates via
Installation Art.

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